

**Voice and Sight Tag Program and Leash Regulations on  
Open Space and Mountain Parks Lands  
Baseline Conditions Monitoring: Executive Summary**



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## Executive Summary

The Voice and Sight Dog Tag Program (Tag Program) is a management strategy within the Education and Outreach, Safety and Enforcement, Recreation Opportunities and User Conflict Reduction Initiatives of the Visitor Master Plan (City of Boulder 2005). Under the Tag Program, launched in the summer of 2006, visitors wishing to manage their dog(s) off-leash and under voice and sight control are required to have a voice and sight tag visibly displayed on their dogs. From 2006 through 2014 the process of obtaining a voice and sight tag required an applicant to view a video describing the requirements of voice and sight control, acknowledge understanding of those requirements, pay a fee and complete a registration form. Beginning in January 2015, participants are also required to attend an hour-long in-person Tag Program training session. Dog guardians not registered in the program or who do not have a voice and sight tag visibly displayed on their dog are required to keep their dog on-leash while visiting Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) and other City of Boulder properties where voice and sight control is an option.

Previous monitoring conducted before (2006), immediately after (2007) and almost four years after (2010) the program's launch, as well as other sources of information, indicated that the program achieved some but not all of the original objectives (City of Boulder 2011). In 2011, OSMP was directed by Boulder City Council to evaluate and recommend revisions to the Tag Program. In collaboration with the public and appointed advisors, OSMP has developed a number of Tag Program enhancements designed to improve the program and increase understanding of and compliance with Tag Program requirements. The current monitoring project is scheduled to be conducted before ("baseline"), soon after and three years after implementing Tag Program enhancements to gain an understanding of any measurable change in observed behaviors.

During development of the 2014 protocol, staff determined that repeating the previous methods would not meet current project needs, and a new methodology was created based upon a literature review, public and Open Space Board of Trustees input, professional peer review and professional judgment.

Dog management success is important to maintain quality visitor experiences and for the protection of resources. By the end of the summer of 2010, over 25,000 participants had registered in the Tag Program (City of Boulder 2011) and OSMP receives about 2 million annual dog visits (on and off-leash) (Vaske et al. 2009).

The overall goals of the enhanced Tag Program are to:

- ✧ *Increase the proportion of dog guardians visiting OSMP who have control over their dogs as required by applicable regulations, including proof of current dog rabies vaccinations;*
- ✧ *Maintain a safe, high-quality visitor experience for all; and*
- ✧ *Contribute to natural resource conservation.*

The Tag Program enhancements project's objective relevant to this monitoring study is to:

- ✧ *Increase compliance with observed dog regulations and voice and sight control rules.*

## Methods

During development of the 2014 protocol, staff determined that repeating the previous methods would not meet current project needs, and a new methodology was created based upon a literature review, departmental needs, public and Open Space Board of Trustees input, professional peer review and professional judgment.

Data for this project were collected on trails with designated dog access across OSMP from May-July 2014 using direct observation and visitor interviews. There were 64 locations allocated as both Voice and Sight and Leash Interview component sites, 13 as Voice and Sight only sites, 17 as Leash Interview only sites and 34 as Leash Required sites.

## Major Findings

Compliance rates for most individually measured attributes and indicators were >70% during baseline (i.e., 2014) monitoring, and overall compliance was 67% (details below). Categories with lower compliance rates were:

- ⌘ More than 2 dogs off-leash per guardian (12%);
- ⌘ Excrement pickup (69%); and
- ⌘ Interactions with wildlife/livestock (50%).

Baseline conditions as characterized during this project along with the results from the two additional monitoring periods (2016, 2018) will inform future discussions about ranges of acceptable compliance rates and associated standards for future dog regulations along with associated compliance studies.

### *Voice and Sight Regulations*

During monitoring of the Voice and Sight Regulations component, 310 visitor parties were observed. The **overall compliance rate was 67%**. Individual compliance results, estimated at the visitor party level, include:

- ⌘ **Tag display:** 69%
- ⌘ **Within sight:** 93%
- ⌘ **No more than 2 dogs per guardian off-leash (8 total visitor parties observed with more than 2 dogs per guardian; 7 parties had more than 2 dogs per guardian off-leash):** 12%
- ⌘ **Voice control:** 77%
- ⌘ **Charging, chasing or otherwise displaying aggression toward any person** or behave toward any person in a manner that a reasonable person would find harassing or disturbing:
  - Including passes (i.e., dog passes by person without interaction) and interactions (i.e., dog and person interact): 92%
  - Including interactions only: 70%
- ⌘ **Charging, chasing or otherwise displaying aggression toward any dog:**
  - Including passes and interactions: 87%

- Including interactions only: 81%
- ☞ **Chasing, harassing or disturbing wildlife or livestock:**
  - Including passes and interactions: 50%
  - Including interactions only: 29%

### *Leash Interviews*

During the Leash Interview component, 302 visitor parties were observed and/or interviewed. Close to 91% of visitor parties observed and/or interviewed had a leash for each dog being managed under voice and sight control. The majority of those parties in compliance with the leash possession regulation had the correct number of leashes visible to the observer (205 visitor parties) and these parties were not contacted for an interview. Ninety-seven visitor parties were contacted for an interview and of these, 70 had the correct number of leashes with them, 13 parties did not and 14 parties had unknown leash possession status because they did not stop and/or stopped but refused participation.

### *Dog Excrement*

The 2014 project included numerous new sampling sites, the majority of which were located beyond the trailhead area. Because of this change, and the possibility that dogs are more likely to relieve themselves near the start of the trail, we anticipated observing fewer events than during the previous project (*n* ranged from 100-188 during 2006-2010). As expected, we observed fewer dogs defecating. Of the 26 visitor parties observed with one or more such events, 18 parties (69%) both picked up and took the bag with them. Eight parties (31%) did not meet the requirements due to not picking up, or picking up and then leaving the bag on the side of the trail.

### *Leash Required*

Staff observed 238 visitor parties during observation for the Leash Required component. Of these, 195 parties had all of their dogs leashed (82% compliance).

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations for increasing compliance and improving project management include:

1. Further develop decision-making strategies for dog management.
2. Implement strategies to maximize visitor compliance with dog regulations.
3. Increase dog guardians' voice control skills.
4. Re-test observer variability and review the methods during each data collection interval.
5. Refine analysis techniques and database structure.
6. Consider developing new dog monitoring indicators related to ecological health and visitor experience quality.
7. Consider developing new dog monitoring indicators and studies related to understanding the benefits of recreating with dogs.
8. Conduct a study aimed at understanding barriers to compliance with dog regulations on OSMP.
9. Consider communication recommendations from published literature.